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ARTS, CRAFTS AND THE HOME

THE HEARTHSTONE

BY WALTER A. DYER

Author of *"The Lure of the Antique," "Early American Craftsmen,"*
"Creators of Decorative Styles," etc.

Men make them fires on the hearth
Each under his roof-tree,
And the Four Winds that rule the earth
They blow the smoke to me.

— Kipling



WHEN I sit before my open fire, watching the embers fall apart and the red flames leaping up the chimney, I am experiencing a sensation that is universal among mankind. Wherever there are caves, dug-outs, wigwams, tents, shacks, shanties, cabins, huts, bungalows, and palaces, there are fires. So essential is the fire to human existence, so intimate a part of the house is it, that the word hearthstone has often been used as a synonym for home.

These are the thoughts that come to me before my blazing logs. And I know that the pleasure I feel has a good deal of the primitive and savage in it. My ancestors in prehistoric times sat thus and warmed themselves and mused. For the hearthstone is an older invention than chair or table. Historically, it is the oldest thing we have in our homes, and it were the sheerest folly to allow the steam radiator, ugly, awkward, and cheerless, entirely to supplant it. I for one would never buy or build a house without fireplaces in it, or without the opportunity of installing them therein. A large fireplace in the living-room, one in the dining-room, and smaller ones in the chambers and lesser apartments—that is not too many, according to my way of thinking.

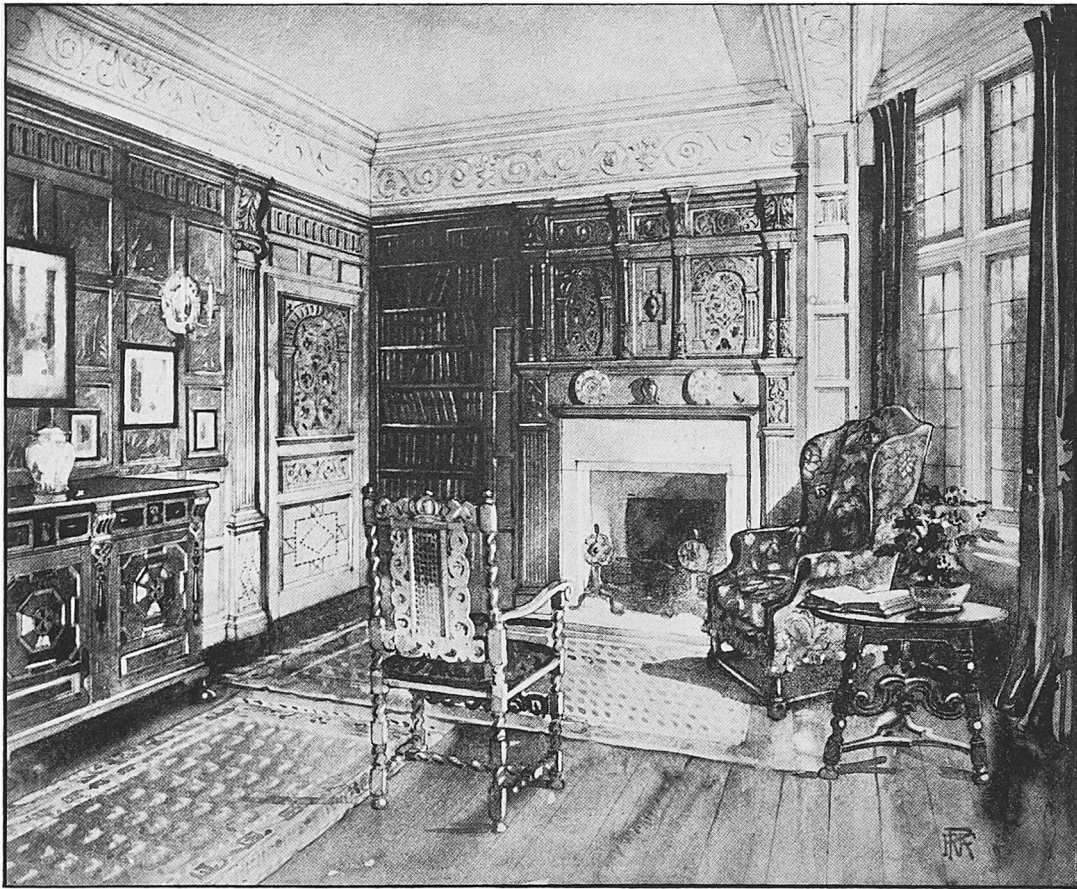
So much of poetry and romance clusters about the hearthstone that I think I am in little danger of doing damage by looking into the more prosaic history of the institution, for an institution it is. In the beginning it was, of course, a mere place for a fire in a sheltered nook or at the entrance of the cave-dweller's place of residence. Then, for many centuries, it was a flat stone in the center

of the hut or house, innocent of anything like a chimney, the smoke finding its way as best it might through a hole in the roof. Such a hearthstone is still to be seen among primitive savage peoples, and even in old Irish huts. In fact, the fireplace, as we know it, is a comparatively modern invention.

It was probably the Romans who first made use of the chimney and devised more or less elaborate heating systems. It was a clever Roman who first conceived the idea of at once conserving heat and getting rid of smoke. His name should have been preserved along with those of the other great discoverers of mechanical principles. But the chimney has become so familiar and commonplace an object with us that we have forgotten what a revolutionary event its introduction was.

The Romans naturally found it desirable to introduce their heating arrangements in the northern colonies where they made their homes, and it is probable that the Gauls and Teutons learned of chimneys from them. Whether the Romans introduced the chimney into Britain is not recorded. The credit is usually given to William the Conqueror and the Normans of the eleventh century. The Britains were slow to take up with the new-fangled notion, and the old form of hearthstone without a chimney persisted in England, especially in the rural districts, as late as the sixteenth century. In conservative old Oxford, indeed, some of the great halls were heated in this way after 1800. In Penshurst Place, Kent, the old, chimneyless brick fireplace is still to be seen in the





A JACOBEOAN
LIBRARY IN
WHICH THE
FIREPLACE
HAS A
HARMONIOUS
SETTING

*Courtesy of
W. & J. Sloane,
New York.*

middle of the banqueting hall, with its andirons and billet-bar.

But gradually the Norman idea took hold, and newer fashions in fireplaces came into use in England. The evolution of the chimney there is

interesting. First, the central hole in the roof was followed by apertures under the eaves, which at least had the merit of not letting in so much rain and snow. Later, toward the last half of the thirteenth century, a smoke vent was provided in the roof directly over the fire and was protected by a covered turret or louver (from the French *l'ouvert*), and for two centuries or more this was an important architectural feature. In the eleventh century a large bell-shaped extinguisher, called a *couvre-feu* or curfew, was frequently used to cover the fire at nightfall.

As Tudor followed Norman, the fireplace became the center of decorative as well as of social interest, and its development has an artistic as well as a domestic significance. In the eleventh century the Normans introduced the recessed fireplace at the side of the room, the forerunner of our modern fireplace. In English homes this became fairly common in chambers during the twelfth century, while the central hearth persisted in the great halls as late as the fifteenth.

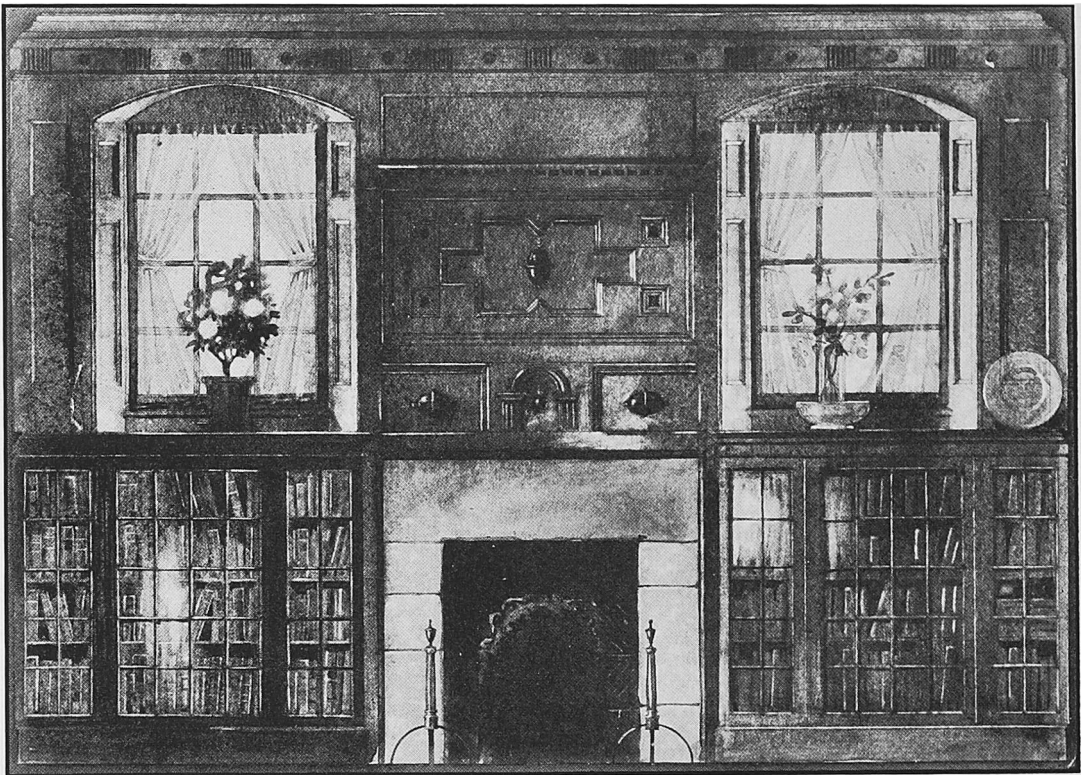
But it was the Norman house of two or three stories that made the chimney really an imperative need. At first it wasn't much of a chimney. The hearthstone was placed at the side of the room and a sort of flue was made for the smoke in the wall a short distance above. Then began a series of improvements, all designed to carry off the smoke and heat the rooms more effectively. It was found desirable to set the hearthstone in an arched recess, or beneath a sloping hood of stone or



Courtesy of Arthur Todhunter.

THE MODERN FIREPLACE IS THE CENTER OF DECORATIVE INTEREST

SUGGESTED
ELEVATION
FOR DINING-
ROOM:
SUNLIGHT,
FIRELIGHT,
BOOKS—
WHAT MORE
COULD ONE
DESIRE?



Courtesy of
W. & J. Sloane,
New York.

plaster, with masonry jambs at the sides to confine the draft. Finally the outside chimney was added. Turret chimneys were first built during the fourteenth century, but did not become common for two hundred years after that. It was in Tudor times that brick chimneys and clustered chimney-pots became an architectural feature.

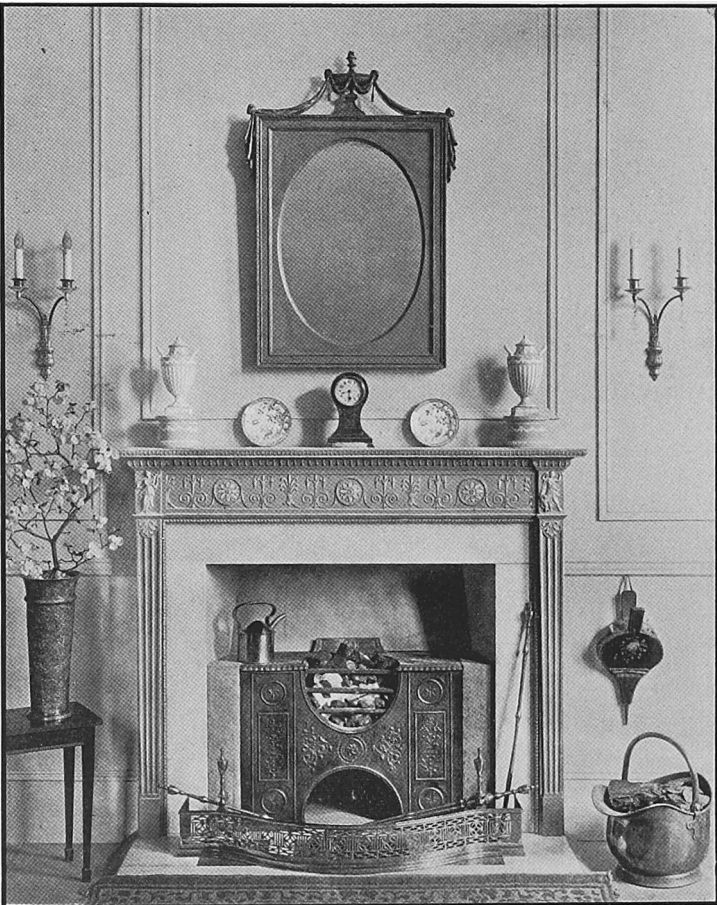
Toward the end of the fourteenth century the recess was deepened and the hood was gradually abandoned. During the Gothic period the decorative possibilities of the fireplace were more fully discovered, and the stone arches, frames, and chimney-breasts were carved more or less elaborately.

The recessed fireplace did not find its way into the yeoman's cottage until about the sixteenth century, when huge chimney-corners or inglenooks became common. They also became a feature of the tap-rooms of English inns.

By Queen Elizabeth's time the chimney-piece had become the most important feature of the room, and the fireplace may be said to have entered upon its final stage of development in the Tudor period. At that time the mechanical features were also greatly improved. Some of these fine old Elizabethan chimneypieces are still extant in England and are a source of inspiration for modern architects. During the Jacobean period the decorative possibilities of the overmantel were further developed. Oaken paneling became a feature and later, with the coming of Grinling Gibbons, elaborate carving.

In the late eighteenth century the Adam brothers introduced a more simple classic style which was reflected in many of the

homes of the New World. Here we still have fine old chimneypieces in our so-called Colonial houses, which form the basis of some of the finest of modern work. Particularly noteworthy were those



Courtesy of Arthur Todhunter.

SUGGESTIVE OF TEA AND COZINESS

designed and built by Samuel McIntire in Salem, which have often been measured and copied by modern architects. Meanwhile, of course, in the farmhouses the more primitive form of large fireplace, with its crane and pots, persisted for many years.

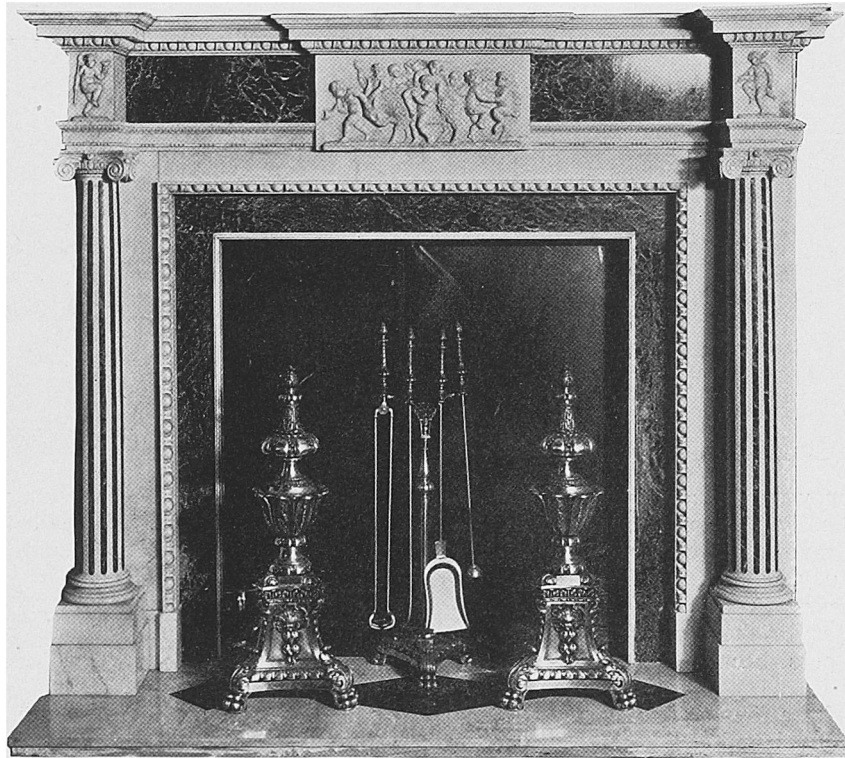
Such, in brief outline, is the history of the fireplace. It is worth knowing about, for we are always harking back to the workmanship of other days for the basis of modern designs. We are

fireplaces are designed in harmony with the furniture.

It is as important to know something of these styles in fireplaces as in exterior architecture and in furniture design, for consistency in decoration is a matter that can not be preached too often. But in the matter of fireplaces particularly it is well worth while to do the thing right.

For, as I have already said, the fireplace, through its historical associations, has assumed a place of

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Courtesy of William H. Jackson Company.

building better chimneys now than our forefathers did; we know how to make fireplaces that will not smoke. But in the matter of design we have much to learn from them. It is all well enough in the mountain bungalow to install a rustic fireplace of cobble stones, but in the more pretentious home we can not be too careful of our fireplace architecture. We have the examples of the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Georgian periods to guide us—the beautiful work of Sir Christopher Wren, Robert Adam, and Samuel McIntire. If we are to furnish our rooms in the period styles, we should see to it that the

prime importance in the household. There has always been a religious idea connected with the hearthstone, and it still stands as the family altar. It is the center of family and social life, and it has become a center of decorative interest as well.

The love for the open fire is bred in our blood, and it is an honest and worthy inheritance. If the day should ever come when the hearthstone has been driven out by the gas-log and the steam radiator, I for one shall feel that a spirit has gone out of our American family life that no modern invention can replace.

